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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs And other elections: election of fifteen members of the Human Rights Council

Letter dated 11 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the pleasure to recall that the Government of the State of Qatar has presented its candidature for re-election as a member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2018-2020, at the elections to be held during the seventy-second session of the General Assembly, in 2017.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, the State of Qatar is pleased to transmit herewith its voluntary pledges and commitments to the promotion and protection of human rights at the national and international levels (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would arrange for the present letter and its annex to be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 115 (d) of the preliminary list of items.

(*Signed*) Alya Ahmed S. **Al-Thani**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/72/50.

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Annex to the letter dated 11 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidacy of the State of Qatar to the Human Rights Council

Introduction

The promotion and protection of human rights is one of the policy pillars of the State of Qatar, which believes that human rights, peace, security and safety are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

That priority is reflected in a constitutional and legislative system that embodies the principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and respects and protects everyone. In institutional terms, it is reflected in a range of human rights institutions and agencies that contribute effectively to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Respect for and promotion and protection of human rights are a strategic choice underpinning the Government's comprehensive reform process. That approach was highlighted in the Qatar National Vision 2030, an overarching vision for development that addresses key human rights dimensions in such areas as education, health, the environment, labour rights, the empowerment of women, children's rights and its national development strategy. The Government of the State of Qatar considers the promotion and protection of human rights to be the cornerstone of its foreign policy.

It has therefore adopted a forward-thinking policy to consolidate a culture of human rights. Its approach is focused on the rule of law, transparency, justice and human dignity. Qatar has adopted a wide range of specific, tangible and ground-breaking measures over the last few years. Its aim has been to mainstream human rights at the domestic and international levels.

Accordingly, Qatar has sought to become a member of the Human Rights Council since the latter was established. Qatar believes in the important role of the Council as the primary organ of the United Nations for the promotion and protection of human rights. It hopes to continue playing an effective, positive and constructive role on the Human Rights Council, as it has done at the current and previous sessions. To that end, it is submitting its candidacy for membership of the Council for the term 2018-2020.

Efforts and achievements of the State of Qatar during its previous terms as a member of the Human Rights Council

Throughout its membership of the Human Rights Council in the periods 2007-2010, 2011-2013 and 2015-2017, the State of Qatar cooperated actively and constructively with Member States in order to fulfil the Council's mandate in the best possible way and achieve the noble aims for which it was established.

The Government of the State of Qatar is convinced of the need to continue working through this important international forum. It has therefore decided to submit its candidacy for membership in the Council for the period 2018-2020. Having fulfilled its national and international obligations and continued to work towards meeting the commitments that it made upon election to the Council in 2007, 2011 and 2014, the State of Qatar was further encouraged in its bid for re-election. In this regard, the most significant steps taken by the Government during the past term are as follows:

National level

- Legislation and local regulations have been enacted with a view to providing a legal framework for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensuring consistency with the relevant international instruments. Some examples follow:

  - Law No. 16 (2016) on mental health sets forth broad health care rights, including access to appropriate care in accordance with medically recognized standards, in addition other rights involving the patient's autonomy and privacy.

  - Law No. 21 (2015) regulates the entry, exit and residence of migrants. It abolishes the *kafala* system that had existed previously. It provides more flexibility and freedom for migrants, and ensures greater protection for the rights of migrants, including the workers who are contributing to the construction of the country's infrastructure.

  - Law No. 7 (2013) on social health insurance establishes a mandatory health insurance scheme to ensure the provision of basic health services to all Qatari nationals, citizens of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, residents and visitors.

  - Law No. 15 (2011) on combating human trafficking marks an important step in the country's efforts to combat human trafficking and protect the victims of trafficking-related crimes.

  - Law No. 8 (2010) amends the Penal Code promulgated by Law No. 11 (2011) to include an explicit definition of torture identical to the one set forth in article 1 of the Convention against Torture.

  - Qatar has ratified the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. This measure demonstrates political will to promote the values of tolerance and freedom of thought and expression. It underscores the importance of culture in achieving social integration and fostering equality and non-discrimination.

- Numerous governmental human rights institutions have been established, and the establishment of non-governmental institutions has also been encouraged. In particular, the following actions have been taken:

  - The National Committee on Human Trafficking was established in 2016 with a view to coordinating national efforts to monitor and prohibit all forms of human trafficking. Its responsibilities include preparing a national plan on human trafficking and preparing and disseminating an annual report on the country's efforts to combat human trafficking, acting in coordination with the agencies and authorities responsible for protecting and supporting the victims of human trafficking. A draft national plan on combating human trafficking (2017-2022) has now been prepared for adoption in the near future. The Arab Initiative to Combat Human Trafficking was launched in cooperation with the United Nations on Drugs and Crime and the League of Arab States in the period 2011-2014. Qatar provided $6 million towards building national capacities to combat human trafficking in the Arab region. The funds provided for training sessions for judges, investigators and police officers active in human trafficking cases. The sessions will come to an end in December 2017.

  - The Qatar Foundation for Social Action, which was established in 2013, is a high-level institution whose board of directors that oversees and

monitors entities involved in the area of social affairs in an integrated manner. It formulates and develops plans, programmes, policies and strategies aimed at furthering the objectives of civil society institutions and following up their implementation, in cooperation and coordination with Government ministries and agencies and with public and private entities at home and abroad. It includes the following components: the Social Protection and Rehabilitation Centre, which seeks to protect children and women from family violence; the Family Consulting Centre, the Centre for the Care of Orphans, the Centre for the Empowerment and Care of the Elderly, the Shafallah Centre for Persons with Special Needs and the Best Buddies Initiative (Qatar).

- The National Committee for International Humanitarian Law was established under Law No. 27 (2012) in order to advise the Government and help it implement and disseminate international humanitarian law.

- The Administrative Control and Transparency Authority was established by virtue of Emiri Decree No. 75 (2011) to provide oversight, ensure transparency and integrity and combat corruption in all its forms and manifestations.

- The National Committee for Occupational Health and Safety was established by virtue of Cabinet decision No. 16 (2011), which was a result of the efforts of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in cooperation with experts from the International Labour Organization.

- The Qatar Committee for the Alliance of Civilizations, was established by virtue of Cabinet decision No. 8 (2010) in order to combat intolerance and underscore the role of civilizations in promoting dialogue, resolving conflicts, consolidating the values of tolerance, solidarity and peace among the world's peoples, and furthering human development.

• The following legislative and procedural measures have been taken at various levels to protect and promote the rights of labourers and migrant workers:

- At its meeting of 8 February 2017, the Cabinet approved the Domestic Workers Act and submitted it to the legislative authorities for examination. The Act will regulate relations between employers and domestic workers. The authors of the text have ensured that it is consistent with the provisions of Convention No. 189 of the International Labour Organization concerning decent work for domestic workers.

- Qatar hosted the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in January 2016.

- At its meeting of 19 October 2016, the Cabinet approved a law amending the Labour Code promulgated by Law No. 14 (2004). The new law establishes a committee headed by a judge at the court of first instance for expedited consideration of all disputes arising from the provisions of the Labour Code.

- Law No. 1 (2015) amends certain provisions of the Labour Code promulgated by Law No. 14 (2004). It incorporates legislation to embark on a programme for the protection of labourers' wages in cooperation with the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs and the Central Bank. The private sector, as represented by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Qatar, is also cooperating fully. Decision No. 4 (2015) of the Minister of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs sets out the requirements of the mechanism to

protect the wages of labourers who are covered by the Labour Code. The mechanisms require employers to pay their labourers' wages by a transfer to a bank or financial institution in the country within seven days of the due date.

- In September 2015, the Qatar Development Fund signed a memorandum of understanding with the International Organization for Migration in connection with a project to facilitate the repatriation of stranded Nepalese migrants.

- Decision No. 18 (2014) of the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs determines the parameters of adequate housing for workers. The decision complies with international requirements for workers' temporary or permanent accommodation. In 2015, Qatar opened the largest workers' city, which covers an area of 1,100,000 square metres and is home to 100,000 workers. The city was built at a cost of $825 million. The workers' city was designed to meet the highest health and safety standards. It includes recreation zones and areas for public health, social and security services. The city will act as a template for the construction of seven other workers' cities in the country, housing some 260 workers.

- Hosting international conferences and forums on development, democracy, human rights, and fostering a culture of peace. The Government has convened the Doha Forum, the Conference on Interfaith Dialogue and the US-Islamic World Forum on an annual basis. It also hosted the Fourth Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in 2011, in addition to many global trade conferences and the Doha Implementation Meeting for the Istanbul Process, entitled "Doha Meeting for Advancing Religious Freedom through Interfaith Collaboration". In 2015, Qatar hosted the Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, which culminated in the Doha Declaration. Qatar provided $49 million to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to implement its training programmes on the Doha Declaration. The training programmes will continue until 2020. In January 2016, Qatar hosted a regional conference on the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in promoting and protecting human rights in the Arab region. In April 2016, the United Nations Asia Regional Summit on Business and Human Rights. In February 2017, it hosted an international conference on human rights approaches to confronting conflict situations in the Arab region. Qatar is convinced that it is important to create effective criminal justice mechanisms in order to protect fundamental human rights and promote justice, equality and fairness.

- In March 2014, Qatar hosted a delegation from the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights.

- In January 2014, Qatar hosted the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

- In November 2013, Qatar hosted the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants.

- Qatar has also hosted several non-governmental human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, which visited the country in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, Amnesty International, which visited in 2013 and 2014, and the International Trade Union Federation, which visited in 2014.

International level

Qatar has taken the following actions:

- Endeavoured to participate actively in international efforts to promote and protect human rights, in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Constitution of Qatar;
- Acceded to most of the core international human rights instruments;
- Worked to support the Human Rights Council and cooperate with other international and regional mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights;
- Cooperated with human rights treaty bodies and assiduously fulfilled the relevant obligations, including by submitting the conventions required under the treaties in question. In August 2015, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities considered the first report of Qatar on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. At its seventy-fifth session, the Committee on the Rights of the Child will consider the combined third and fourth reports of Qatar pursuant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Cooperated diligently with the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review Working Group throughout the review process of the second national report of the State of Qatar on 7 May 2014. The Government attaches great importance to the role of the Working Group in helping countries to enhance and strengthen the fulfilment of their obligations under international human rights law. The interactive dialogue brought out the country's commitments and its intensive efforts to advance human rights and fundamental freedoms. Qatar has also placed a significant focus on the findings and recommendations of the first universal periodic review, and has taken numerous steps at various levels;
- Continued to strengthen its relationship with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights by convening regular bilateral consultations since May 2011. Qatar has committed to providing $3 million in financial support. The first instalment, of $1 million, was paid in 2016. Qatar will pay the outstanding balance of the donation;
- Continued to support the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region in Doha;
- Pursued multilateral cooperation under the aegis of various international human rights mechanisms. For instance, it chaired the Social Forum of the Human Rights Council when it met in October 2012 to discuss the topic of human-centred development and globalization. It also chaired the Social Forum that met in October 2015 to discuss the topic of access to medicine in the context of the right to health;
- Participated actively in meetings and other arrangements to address specific threats to human rights. For instance, the country has actively tackled human trafficking through its membership in the Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking. In partnership with other States, it has facilitated consultations on preparations for the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to assess the Global Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking. It has also been a member of the Group of Friends for Gender Parity, the Group of Friends of Older Persons, the Group of Friends of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, the Group for the Dialogue on Humanitarian Partnership in a

Changing World, the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, the Group of Friends of Accountability and the Group of Friends of Persons with Disabilities. Qatar also works to promote closer ties between cultures and peoples by participating actively in the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations;

- Supported collective efforts to preserve the rights of such social categories as children, older persons and persons with disabilities. It has a prominent role to highlight the need to guarantee children's right to education in conflict situations. For example, it organized a high-level event on the margins of the general debate of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly. Qatar has endorsed the initiative to declare 2 April as the international day of autism awareness, and it is currently the chair of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing;

- Cognizant that human rights permeate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Qatar has led international efforts to report on progress made in implementing Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals concerning the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels. Implementation of Goal 16 would have a significant impact on issues involving human rights;

- Played an effective part in pressing for accountability for the worst crimes affecting human rights. The country has been a fundamental partner in the initiative leading to the establishment of an Independent, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011;

- Protected refugees by cooperating and working together to tackle the causes of displacement. It has also increased its donations and assistance for refugees;

- Formulated international humanitarian and development initiatives, including the following:

  - The Protecting Education in Insecurity and Armed Conflict initiative, which aims to protect, support and promote the right to education in current or potential zones of crisis, conflict and war;

  - The Al-Fakhoora initiative, which aims to support and protect students and schools in conflict zones around the world, especially in Gaza;

  - The Silatech initiative, a social initiative that seeks to expand business and employment opportunities for young people throughout the Arab world. Its programmes currently span 15 Arab countries. Since its creation, the Foundation has funded and supported more than 86,000 youth-run projects;

  - The Reach Out To Asia (ROTA) initiative, a charity that operates under the auspices of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. Its mission is to support communities in overcoming obstacles and creating links with a view to achieving education for all, with a focus on extending assistance to Asia;

  - The Education Above All initiative, which took place in 2010 and 2011. The Government believes in the need to address humanitarian and development challenges and to work to provide lasting solutions;

– The Educate a Child initiative, a global initiative aimed at reducing the number of children around the world who are deprived of their right to education as a result of conflicts, wars and natural disasters, as well as children living in urban slums and remote rural areas, including groups that may face special challenges in obtaining an education, such as girls, persons with disabilities and minorities.

Human rights: a cornerstone of Qatar's policy and approach

The State of Qatar is addressing the issue of human rights in an integrated manner that takes into account the importance of fundamental freedoms and democracy, places human beings at the centre of State policy, respects freedom of expression and judicial independence, and promotes a culture of peace and acceptance of others. Recognizing that human development and the protection and promotion of human rights are interdependent, the State of Qatar has pursued comprehensive human development. As a result, the country has experienced an exemplary development renaissance that has made it the region.

In the light of its commitment to a policy based on the interdependence of development and human rights, the Government of Qatar has extended assistance to developing countries around the world. In 2011-2012, Government and private sources provided humanitarian and development aid totalling 3,001,764,000 Qatari riyals. That aid helped 100 countries worldwide, particularly least developed countries, in their endeavour to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

In accordance with its commitment to international law and norms, the Government has supported the rights of peoples in their quest for fundamental freedoms and the rights to dignity, social justice, self-determination and all other human rights.

National level Driven by political will and a climate conducive to promoting and protecting human rights, the Government has focused on the institutional consolidation of human rights. To that end the Government has taken the following actions:

- Working to make the State of Qatar a State governed by the rule of law and institutions, one that safeguards the rights of all who live on its territory, protects their dignity and fulfils the hopes and aspirations of the people of Qatar to achieve development, progress and prosperity;
- Responding quickly and effectively to all human rights-related issues and concerns;
- Incorporating the provisions of international and regional instruments into the domestic legal system, and formulating laws and regulations consistent with international human rights standards;
- Protecting journalists and the freedom of the press and media;
- Conducting a comprehensive review of labour laws, procedures and policies to promote and protect the rights of national and resident workers in accordance with international standards, with a view to strengthening the national human rights regime;
- Qatar has put in place broad policies consistent with international humaa rights standards and has incorporated human rights into the Qatar National Vision 2030. It has also formulated its second national development strategy, for the years 2017-2022. The strategy puts in place a practical projection for

economic, social, cultural, humanitarian and environmental development towards realizing the Qatar National Vision 2030;

- Establishing committees to promote and protect human rights, such as the National Human Rights Committee, the Doha Centre for Media Freedom, the Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue, and the Silatech initiative;
- Creating human rights offices, departments and units within State entities, and empowering those offices to fulfil their functions;
- Conducting campaigns to promote and raise awareness of human rights principles at the national level;
- Appointing a special envoy of the Foreign Minister for counter-terrorism and mediation in conflict resolution with a view to pursuing international efforts to combat terrorism, promote international peace and security, and protect human rights;
- The Secretary-General of the United Nations has appointed Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Meraikhi as humanitarian envoy;
- Qatar has endeavoured to support United Nations entities by every means available and make available the prerequisites of its work with a view to enabling the Organization to fulfil its functions and the purposes for which it was established. In addition to its obligatory contributions to the regular budget and operations of United Nations peacekeeping operations, Qatar has endeavoured to make voluntary contributions to numerous United Nations funds and programmes that seek to alleviate poverty, promote basic education and respond swiftly to disasters and catastrophes. Qatar has made donations to over 41 United Nations bodies or entities. Those voluntary contributions are based on a comprehensive national approach consistent with the State's policies and priorities to support the efforts of international institutions in various areas, including mediation, promoting sustainable development plans, protecting and improving the situation of children in developing countries, eliminating discrimination against women and girls, strengthening humanitarian assistance in areas of conflict and war, and supporting and bolstering efforts to alleviate anticipated humanitarian needs in complex emergency situations, including the issues of protection, endemic poverty and food insecurity. In particular, Qatar has contributed to the following funds and programmes:

1. The United Nations Population Fund;

2. The United Nations Development Programme;

3. United Nations Children's Fund;

4. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women);

5. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, through which the following have been supported:

   (a) The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs;

   (b) The Central Emergency Response Fund;

   (c) Emergency appeals for humanitarian needs;

6. The trust fund on global threats and regional reactions towards a joint response to maritime piracy;

7. The United Nations Trust Fund for the Alliance of Civilizations;

8. The United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children;

9. The trust fund to support missions for activities connected with preventive diplomacy;

10. The Darfur Reconstruction and Development Fund.

Voluntary pledges and commitments made by the State of Qatar

As the State of Qatar hopes to become a member of the Human Rights Council in the period 2018-2020, it pledges to continue making an active contribution to the work of the Council, to support all activities to promote human rights around the world and to mainstream them into all areas. In this context, the State of Qatar undertakes to do the following:

National level

- To adhere to the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, and to mainstream human rights into the range of Government activities at the national and international levels;
- To work to consolidate a culture of human rights through an approach is focused on the rule of law, justice and human dignity;
- To disseminate a human rights perspective when implementing the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the relevant national strategies;
- To continue improving the output and effectiveness of national human rights institutions by drawing on international best practices and sharing experiences;
- To strengthen coordination between national institutions and recently established departments within the State's human rights bodies;
- To continue working to identify the challenges and difficulties hindering the promotion and protection of human rights in Qatar, and developing national legislation, regulations and administrative procedures in response to the positive recommendations made in that regard;
- To support public policies that promote the human rights of social groups, women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and migrant workers;
- To continue integrating human rights into curricula;
- To continue pursuing coordination, cooperation and extensive partnership with all social groups and stakeholders in order to establish a culture of respect for and promotion of human rights and address all challenges and difficulties.

Regional level

- To create incentives to address human rights issues as priority topics in regional forums, mainstream them into regional forums, programmes, activities and priorities;
- To support bilateral and multilateral programmes that contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights among the countries of the region;
- To continue playing a constructive, impartial and honest role, notably through mediation, in resolving regional crises from the legal and humanitarian standpoint, in order to protect and address threats to human rights;

- To continue providing various forms of support for the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region in Doha.

International level

- To use its position as a member of the Human Rights Council in order to preserve the country's effective, constructive and positive role in advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms around the world, and to safeguard the rights of peoples;
- To focus on pressing for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly by strengthening international efforts to report on the progress made in implementing Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals;
- To continue cooperating fully with international organizations and United Nations human rights entities, particularly the Human Rights Council, its bodies and its special procedures and mechanisms;
- To continue supporting for the work of international organizations and the United Nations human rights entities;
- To work to implement the recommendations accepted by the Government during the Universal Periodic Review;
- To maintain the standing invitation extended to the special procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council;
- To consider acceding to the international human rights instruments to which it is not yet a party.